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TRANSIENT AND PERMANENT ELEMENTS IN DEUTERONOMY.

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DEUTERONOMY covers a period of a single month only, the last month of the wanderings of Israel.

It is composed mainly of three discourses, purporting to have been uttered by Moses to the people.

As literature, the style is "pure and beautiful," abounding in "rolling periods" and in "persuasive eloquence."

In scope, Deuteronomy contains some history and some law. But the main feature of the book is its hortatory, persuasive element. History and law are brought in to enforce the writer's plea to the people to serve God faithfully.

It is not surprising that such a book has certain temporary elements.

Such are those sections which forbid the hitching of an ox and an ass together, and the wearing of garments made of cotton and wool mixed.

Deuteronomy forbids a woman to wear the clothes of a man. Though this last, if of permanent force, would help some nowadays who do not sympathize with dress "reform," none of the three is held to be more than a temporary enactment.

The severities against the Canaanites, which the book approves, were only temporary expedients, as were the laws inflicting death on Israelites for idolatry.

Deuteronomy confirms the Levitical priests in their positions. But the whole priestly idea was doomed from the beginning, at least so far as it made priests of a few.

The centralization of worship, which may be the chief immediate expedient of the book, was a step backward, in order to a larger step forward later. It is directly contrary to the

ideal of the prophets, and especially of Jesus. It was a method employed temporarily to uproot idol-worship.

Deuteronomy teaches that wealth and power will follow righteous living. We find no such doctrine in the teaching of Jesus. And, however true the doctrine may have been for that time and people, it is no part of a permanent scheme of religion.

On the other hand, Deuteronomy is very rich in the permanent elements of religion.

Not that it contains them all.

Deuteronomy assumes, but it does not announce, the doctrine of sacrifice, which saturates Leviticus. The efficacy of sacrifice is mentioned once. But the great sacrificial system, with its culminating day of atonement, is not known to Deuteronomy.

Deuteronomy urges the fundamental truth that God reveals himself. The writer speaks as for God. He announces his own work as expressing the mind of God. He bears witness to the fact that God constantly makes himself known.

Deuteronomy teaches that God is one. It has got beyond the idea that Jehovah is simply the greatest of many gods. It sees that Jehovah is the one absolute and only deity.

Deuteronomy insists that this one and only God is spiritual.

The writer does not pour vials of wrath on ritualism, as the prophets had done, and were to do.

But he has no stress for the minutiae of formalism. He would not have the sense of God lost in performances and in clouds of incense. He wants to put the individual alone face to face with Jehovah, without the mediation of priests and sacrifices.

Deuteronomy asserts the love of God. Why did God choose Israel? Why did he break the yoke of Egyptian bondage? Why did he lead Israel through manifold perils to the promised land? The one answer is: Because he loved Israel. The words of Jesus, "God so loved the world . . .," would not have had a strange sound to the writer of Deuteronomy.

Deuteronomy asserts that sin brings sorrow. To be sure, the writer dwells largely upon the external results of sin. The

idea of sin as a moral offense of the individual against a holy God is not as clearly apprehended as it came to be later on. But the underlying principle, that the sinner is out of harmony with all that makes for the best, is abundantly enforced in Deuteronomy. Deuteronomy teaches the fundamental truth that God chastises his people for their good. Deuteronomy makes much of the idea that religion is a matter for everyday life. The writer urges Israelites to be just, obedient to rulers, careful of human life, chaste, humane, sympathetic, forbearing. In all his doings the Israelite is to fear, revere, love, and serve Jehovah, out of gratitude for Jehovah's numberless mercies.

These great truths remain to control and to satisfy the conscience, altogether apart from the conclusions which may be reached upon the literary questions which have arisen concerning this book. We believe these great truths because they commend themselves, not alone because they come to us under the authority of a great name.

And Deuteronomy reminds us of the riches which lie in the too much neglected sections of Sacred Scripture. Deuteronomy becomes a part of one's Bible, in reality, in proportion as Deuteronomy enters into one's knowledge, and thence into one's life.